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Advocates press for full waste pits removal

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File photo

Waste pits

Posted: Thursday, January 5, 2017 12:00 am | Updated: 6:51 am, Thu Jan 5, 2017.

By Christopher James

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Ever since the discovery of the San Jacinto River Waste Pits in 2005, the San Jacinto River Coalition has advocated for full removal, but now the community-led group hopes full removal becomes official in 2017.

In pursuit of that goal, Coalition Director Jacquelyn Young stressed the importance of getting comments in by the Jan. 12 deadline. The Environmental Protection Agency opened up the comment period after proposing removal of 202,000 cubic yards of contaminated material from the waste pits at a cost of nearly \$97 million. After all comments are reviewed, the EPA will release its record of decision, which will contain responses to comments and outline the final remedy.

Conversely, Young informed those at the Tuesday night's meeting that one of the potentially responsible parties is asking for another extension, something she called a stall

"They're at it again," said Young. "They're requesting (an extension) right now to the EPA for them to stall, yet again. (These) are people that have a financial interest in this, not people like most of us, so we need to be

emailing the EPA and letting them know that it's not acceptable. These groups, just like us, have had three months to look over this material and our community has been a part of this for eight years."

Twenty-six people at the meeting signed a letter to the EPA, urging them not to grant anther extension, which was sent Wednesday.

In November, both McGinnes Industrial Maintenance Corp. (one of the responsible parties) and San Jacinto Citizens Against Pollution requested a 60-day extension but were granted 45 days.

More recently, Winstead Law Firm requested another extension on behalf of MIMC to assure the EPA releases all necessary documents regarding the waste pits.

"We believe strongly that all relevant technical information must be available to the public for review and comment in







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order to most thoroughly inform EPA decisions on this site," a MIMC spokesman said.

Rodrigo Cantu, a lawyer with Lone Star Legal Aid who represents a number of residents individually, plans to also submit letters on behalf of his clients but wanted those at the meeting to understand what to expect next.

"The EPA is required to answer, pretty much, every single comment. Now what they'll do is, behind the scenes, they'll sort of synthesize the comments — they'll get so many that talk about fishing and so many that talk about an engineering principle," said Cantu. "They'll address them and then they'll say: here's our response to the comments that talk about this in general."

For decades now, the San Jacinto River Waste Pits have plagued the river, contaminating it with mercury, PCBs, furans and cancer-causing dioxin.

The site, which is just north of the Interstate 10 bridge between Highlands and Channelview, was used as a dumpsite for paper mill sludge from Champion Paper in Pasadena in the mid-1960s.

Once the site was filled to capacity, the company abandoned the pits and like the rest of the surrounding area the pits subsided, exposing the toxic chemicals to the San Jacinto River.

Since its discovery in 2005, the EPA has placed the site on its National Priorities List and oversaw completion of an armored cap in 2011 to temporarily address the release of dioxin in the river.

For more, visit www.epa.gov/tx/sjrwp.



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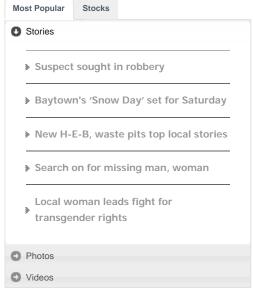
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